

## Heavy Metal Memories At Mac Equipment and Steel



DAVID ZSIDO

*Dave Mac at Mac Equipment and Steel.*

## About the Author

David G. Zsido was born in Proctor. He is a graduate of Mount St. Joseph Academy and Norwich University. David has authored "Antique Trucks: A Different Kind of Horsepower", "The Early Years of Company C 368<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, U.S. Army Reserve in Rutland, Vermont", "The Secrets of Glen Station", "Cinderella's Sweets", "The 486<sup>th</sup> Anti-Anything Battalion", "F.A. Tucker Inc., General Contractors", "One Last Coffee at the Midway Diner", "Titans of Rutland Trucking (1930-1993)" and "Proctor American Legion Post 6 Baseball History".

## Introduction

Some fifty years ago along the straight stretch of highway known as North Main Street or U.S. Route 7 in Rutland, there were a couple of establishments which catered to those who made the most of great summer weather. One was a dairy bar called Seward's. It scooped up several fantastic flavors of ice cream, which were made right on its premises. Today the Seward Family Restaurant still serves ice cream both at the walk-up window and the inside booths. However, it hasn't manufactured its own ice cream for several years. The other establishment was just a little further north on Route 7. The A & W Root Beer stand was nestled among a couple of large stately Dutch elm trees. There a 'car hop' waitress would take your order for a frosty mug of A&W Root Beer and a quick meal that featured the Burger Family of hamburgers as one of the favorites. Then the 'car hop' would return with your food on a tray that clipped onto your partially rolled-down car window. The 'young men' of summer frequented such establishments with their hot cars. Back then, the engines in these hot cars delivered some 300 to 400 plus meaningful horsepower. Many were equipped with dual exhaust glassed packed mufflers, positive traction, and four barrel or multi-carburetors. Frequently, the drivers of these vehicles would provide a free demonstration of the delivered torque as they 'smoked' the tires upon leaving. It appeared as if the police didn't seem to mind such events. Oh, those good ole days; where have they gone?

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By David G. Zsido

As you departed from the A&W stand and headed north, a group of steel spires immediately became visible on the east side of the highway. Today those rusty steel towers have largely become hidden from view by tree growth, which now exceeds their height. These steeples were not those of church belfries, but were the abandoned crane booms from a small variety of manufacturers, such as: Byers, Link Belt, Northwest, and Dixie Crane. These cranes still mark the location of the Mac Equipment and Steel Company. This small business specializes in the sale of a wide variety of metal products, metal fabrication, and the purchase and sale of scrap metal products.

David Mac founded his original salvage business in 1953. This was initially established on Jackson Avenue in Rutland City, a few miles south of its present location. However, he quickly outgrew that location and made the decision to relocate in 1955. The present day operations are situated on some sixty-eight acres of former farmland previously owned by the Clark Family.

According to a special article printed in the Rutland Daily Herald on 30 September 1979, David Mac and his small family moved to the United States from his homeland of Poland in 1949. He was one of the fortunate survivors of the horrors of the Nazi Regime during World War II. He had been incarcerated at the Dachau concentration camp, while his wife, Sonia, had been imprisoned at the Auschwitz camp. With the sponsoring assistance of an influential Rutland businessman, William Ginsburg, and the Rutland Jewish Community, the young family found their way to Rutland. He came to America without knowing a word of English. Nonetheless, he fully understood that America was a land of endless opportunity for those, who had the desire to succeed. Almost immediately he began a business of collecting and recycling scrap steel and other products. He made his way along his collection route with his small pick-up truck. As a very young boy, growing up in the adjoining community of Proctor during the early 1950s, I remember a man, who periodically came through the neighborhood in search of rags and scrap items. I'm not certain, but I'm pretty sure it was Dave. He made his rounds in those early days with a gray GMC pick-up that was probably 1951 vintage.

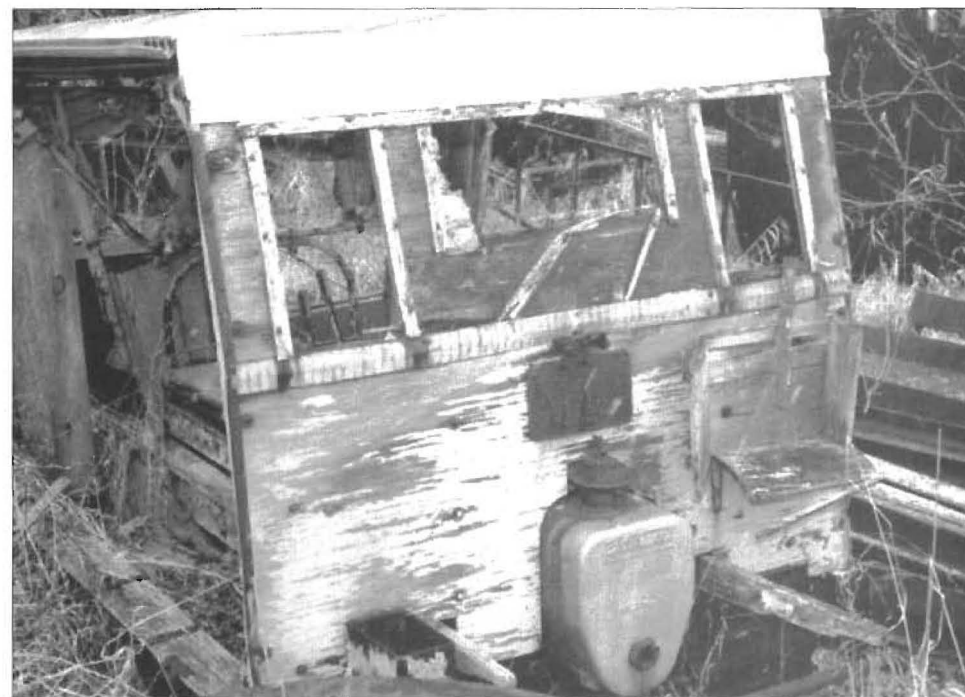
When Dave acquired the Clark farm in 1955, the old colonial style farmhouse still occupied a plot of land directly adjacent to U.S. Route 7. Dave and his family lived there for a number of years. Ultimately, in 1964

he built a new home just a short distance away on Field Avenue. Then the old house was vacant for many years before it was razed to make room for an additional steel lay-down area next to a large blue storage building that had subsequently been erected. Over the years all other barns and buildings associated with the original farm were demolished. However, one solitary wooden corn crib remains as reminder of the property's original use. It stands as a stately island, which is encircled by various pieces of steel and cast iron that are somewhat historical in nature.

Dave was able to serve the scrap disposal needs of many of the previous heavy industries that were located in the greater Rutland area. These included firms like the Rutland Railway, Patch Wegner Howe Scale, Vermont Marble Company, Central Vermont Public Service Corporation, Allied Light & Power, numerous old construction companies, milk bottling businesses, and tractors from dairy farms. Also, over the years, some trucks and semi-trailers from local transportation companies made their way into Mac's yard. In part, this included firms, such as, Guy Wilson, Goddard Transportation, Carris Reels, Coca-Cola, and many small general contractors. In addition, during the earlier years of the business, Dave also acquired and resold various pieces of heavy equipment and machinery from the slate quarries that were concentrated along the Vermont – New York border. While he did accept automobiles for several years, he ceased that particular type of acquisition in 1965. The curious thing about the cars, many of which are still in the yard, is that it appears most of them were driven through the front gate at Mac's. These vehicles from the 1940s and 1950s can be found today with the key in the ignition and the battery under the hood. It was also during this period that what had been called Dave Mac's Junk Yard became formally transformed into the Mac Equipment & Steel Company. David died in 1998 at the age of 84 years.

Dave's son, Irving, joined the operations in 1984. Prior to that Irving had completed college studies at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. After concluding a tour with the U.S. Army, he served as the Director of the Bureau of Traffic and Transportation for the City of Atlanta, Georgia, under the administrations of Mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young.

Ultimately, the third generation of the Mac Family joined the business perhaps some nineteen years ago. Irving's son, Josh, came on board and presently serves as the company's vice president. Josh has a keen eye for items of scrap that might be categorized as 'junk art'. He has saved many old artifacts from being shipped off for melt down.



TOP: Rutland Railway section car with Fairmont engine.

BOTTOM: McCormick-Deering 10-20 tractor.







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TOP: Ford cabs retired from Carris Reels.

BOTTOM: Brockway truck from Guy Wilson fleet.



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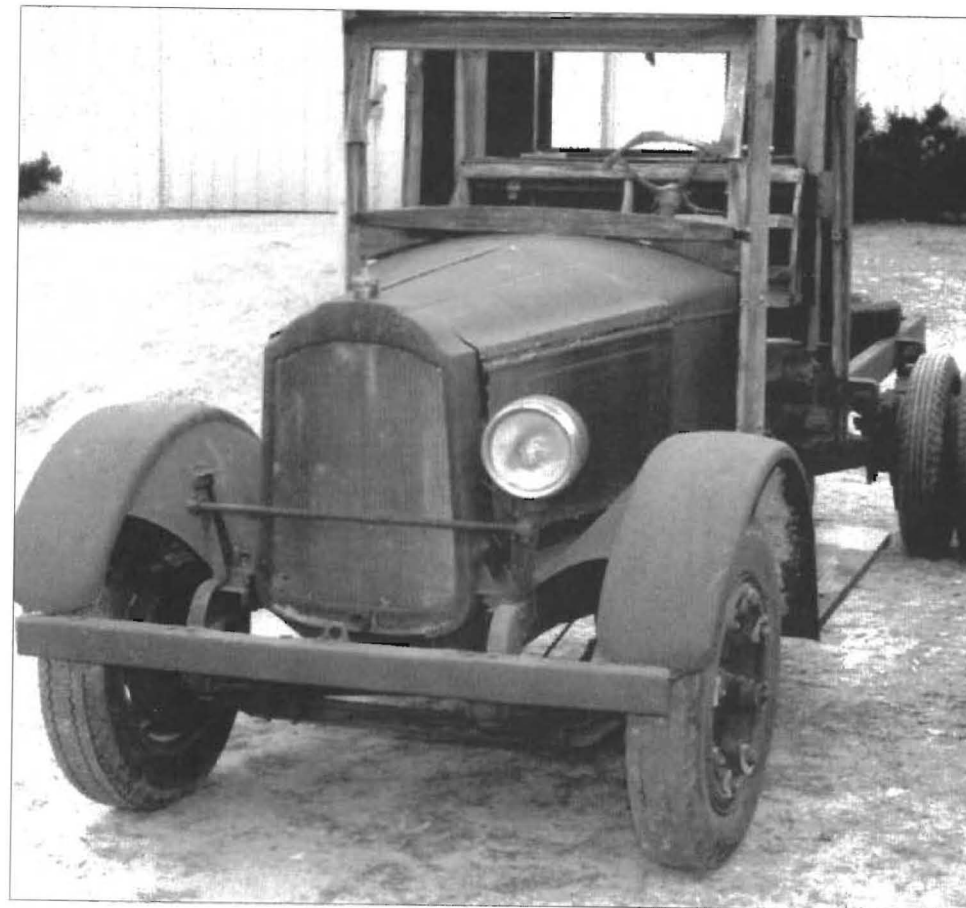
DAVID ZSIDO

Irving Mac at left, poses with Josh, as they stand in front of an old Link Belt crane.

Both men recall a visitor who came into their yard a few years ago. The person made several return visits, and each time would leave with an unusual piece of steel or cast iron. However, he never mentioned what he had in mind for the pieces. Months later, Irving received a large envelop in the mail. Sensing no urgency with the delivery, he placed the envelope into a pile with other non-essential mail. Once he got around to opening it; he discovered a few photographs from that particular person. Then Irving and Josh learned that this individual had been commissioned by the Smithsonian Institute to construct a 'Rube Goldberg' contraption.

My first encounter with Dave occurred during the summer of 1964. I had just purchased my first car, a 1934 Ford two-door sedan, suicide doors and all. The rear fenders were a little on the 'tender' side, so I was in search of a replacement pair. Someone advised me that there was a '34 Ford sitting in Dave Mac's junkyard with reasonably good rear fenders. However, that person also advised me that Dave could be someone with whom it might be just a little difficult to deal. As I was slightly nervous and not certain as what to expect, I pulled into Dave's yard. Sheepishly I walked up to him and told him what I was looking for. Dave acknowledged that he did have a 1934 Ford. However, if I wanted the fenders, I'd have to buy the whole vehicle. As a young high school student with limited resources, I had to back away from the deal.

Some thirty plus years later, Bob Giddings of Giddings Manufacturing Company in Pittsford happened to be in the yard when large piles of scrap that had been stored for decades were being moved. Behind one of these mammoth piles of heavy iron were the remains of a rather unusual truck, an around 1928 Willys Knight, Model 26. In 1928, Rutland Machine & Automobile Company was located at 107-109 West Street in Rutland. This dealership sold Franklin, Willys Knight, and Overland vehicles. So this chassis was possibly one of the very few trucks sold from that location. Bob acquired the truck in the late fall of 1995 and brought it to his Pittsford business. In an extremely short period of time, he did a modest amount of preservation work on the old rig; returning many of its characteristic features. Bob also recalled a pair of diesel single cylinder engines, which had been utilized in the Patch Wegner foundry in Rutland. These engines had large diameter flywheels. Irving added to Bob's memories and remembered that one may have been hooked up to an industrial shear at the Patch foundry, while the second powered the facility's back-up generator. He remembered that they had been placed in the yard near the front gate. While one went on to be scrapped, he thought an antique equipment hobbyist from Woodstock, Vermont, might have rescued the second one.



*An about 1928 Willys Knight truck found in the Mac Equipment yard.*

The Willys Knight was not the only old truck from the 1920s. Parked next to it was a small White motor truck. In another part of the yard was a rusty remnant of a rather scarce early 1930s Diamond T truck. These old trucks also disappeared more than twenty years ago. At one point, Dave parted ways with several older automobiles from the 1920s and 1930s. These were probably the best selection of early automobiles in the yard. These he sold to a local collector named, William Ames. If memory serves me correctly, he moved these to a large barn on the south end of Rutland on Cold River Road, where they were placed in storage. Sadly a massive fire leveled the barn on 4 June 1979. The fierce fire consumed the Ames' collection and a restored antique car owned by then Mayor of Rutland, Gilbert Godnick. On somewhat of a related note, one of the City of Rutland's early fire trucks found its way to Mac's yard when it was removed from active service.

According to a retired veteran firefighter, Raymond Mooney, the old tiller truck was a 1927 American LaFrance. The truck was equipped with a 75-foot ladder. Ray served on the Department for 35 years as a full-time firefighter and retired as a Lieutenant. Fortunately, Ray preserved a handful of photographs of the tiller truck, when it was in its 'glory days'. Sadly the old fire truck sat in the yard for a few years before it was rescued. While not confirmed, it was reported that an out-of state collector acquired the American LaFrance and eventually restored it.

It was during the middle part of April in 2014, when the telephone rang and Josh Mac provided me with an update of work that was taking place in the yard. He noted that many old trucks, which had not been visible for years, had recently been 'exposed' as he and his crew moved more long-standing mountains of old iron and cut trees and brush that were further hiding the old relics. Josh suggested that I should grab my camera and stop by. He also recommended that I be on guard as the deer ticks were extremely plentiful and bothersome.

Over the years since 1996, I have made countless visits to the yard, looking through piles of scrap and taking photographs. When I returned on 19 April 2014, I wasn't sure just how many other old trucks and vehicles that I hadn't seen before, would now be visible. I was in for a surprise! Moreover, I heeded Josh's advice about being prepared for ticks. I slipped on tall rubber boots, used a generous dose of DEET, and tried to avoid contact with the dense brown brush. Nonetheless, a few days later I discovered that one of those nasty critters had embedded itself on the backside of my left calf. It took a visit to the doctor where he used an instrument that resembled a tiny plastic wrecking bar to remove the tick.

However, my journey through the yard on that day certainly opened my eyes to previously hidden vehicles that I had never had the opportunity to view before. Judging from the numerous white tail deer tracks on the freshly created roadways throughout the northerly side of the yard, they were also getting a glimpse of the landscape, which they had not seen before. Obviously, these vehicles had perhaps succumbed to the adverse effects of severe weather conditions for decades as they silently sat in place. Many of them still had their batteries connected to their electrical systems, which led to speculation that they had been driven into the yard and parked in their final resting places. Josh noted that he really didn't have any intentions of scrapping out the remains of these old vehicles. Like his grandfather, Josh wasn't interested in selling any parts or components. However, he would consider selling a complete chassis if

there was an interested buyer. Ultimately, he was largely inclined to simply leave them parked as heavy metal pieces of junk art to preserve the memories of a bygone era for a while longer, as they slowly faded away forever. These tired rusty remains from the past are still guarded by ticks. So if you visit the yard make sure you apply DEET or some other repellent. Don't worry about any junkyard dogs, although you may be greeted at the office by a rooster named Walter. Josh noted at the time of my visit that a cat family had been wandering about. However these cats weren't domestic cats, but a family of five bobcats!

In the months that followed that springtime visit, a couple of 'robotic guards' were created and stationed at the main entrance to the property. These giant monuments are conglomerations of various scrap pieces of iron that were found within the yard. The concept was the brainstorm of Josh. The first unit was assembled and welded together by an employee named Jed. Irving never knew anything of the concept until he heard the creaking from rusty crawler tracks, looked out of the office window, and saw that first 'robot' being towed past the scales to a position that it now occupies adjacent to US Route 7. Since then, a few more of these creative art pieces have been added to the yard's entryway. These giants are certainly appropriate greeters to those, who visit the yard, a yard, which contains so many 'heavy metal memories'.



*First piece of "junk art" at Mac Steel.*